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The Fascism of Vladimir Zhirinovskii: Political Religion and the Rise of the Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia in the Early 1990s

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Abstract

This paper applies the concept of generic fascism to post-Soviet Russia's leading extremely right-wing, so-called Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia founded in 1989, and, since then, under the leadership of Vladimir Zhirinovskii. It, first, introduces a notion of fascism as a political religion that can be defined as 'palingenetic ultra-nationalism'. It, second, briefly outlines Zhirinovskii's agenda of the necessity of Russia's 'Last Dash to the South'. Third, it analyzes whether and in which way the fascist criteria of ultra-nationalism and palingenesis relate to Zhirinovskii's plan of the creation of a new Russian empire that would include, apart from the former Soviet republics, also Turkey, Afghanistan and Iran. Finally, the paper briefly discusses implications of a classification of Zhirinovskii's programme as fascist for the international comparative study of the extreme right.

Conceptualizing Fascism

Arguably, the most important development in recent comparative fascist historiography has been the formulation of a comprehensive hermeneutic interpretation, and related concise definition of generic fascism by Roger Griffin since the 1990s (Griffin 1993, 1995, 1998, 2007; Griffin *et al.* 2006). Apart from providing a succinct capture of the core idea of fascism, Griffin distinguished himself from other taxonomers of fascism in that he applied the classical mode of definition through the *per genus et differentiam* formula. He first established the *genus proximum* of fascism (i.e. the political ideology of ultra-nationalism), and then identified the *differentium specificum* (i.e. palingenetic) that makes fascism dissimilar from other varieties of the more general category of phenomena (i.e. ultra-nationalisms) to which fascism belongs. Thus, according to Griffin's definition, fascism can be conceptualized as 'a genus of political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a palingenetic form of populist ultra-nationalism' (Griffin 1993, p. 26).

'Mythic core' refers in this context less to the extreme utopianism and anti-rationalism of fascism. Rather, Griffin argues that the core of *every* ideology can be understood as a fundamental myth. The simple visionary principles of myths are in general of an irrational kind, and constitute the inspirational power which mobilizes activists and followers of political movements driven by this or that ideology. The term 'palingenetic' is, in the humanities, mainly used in the context of religious studies and expresses the myth of rebirth and regeneration. In spite of the obscurity of the term, 'palingenetic' ideas are, in fact, common features of human thought. They may emerge in many spheres of social life – whenever attempts are made to renew, regenerate or revolutionize something.[1] In the political context, 'palingenetic' is meant to embody the aspiration to create a new

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order following a period of perceived decline or decadence (Griffin 1993, p. 240). That means that it neither implies duplication or restoration of, nor a return or relapse to, a former era. Instead, it denotes a cleansing renovation, rejuvenation, or resurrection, on a new level. That means, an ultra-nationalist palingenesis – though, perhaps, containing ideas also associated with ultra-conservatism (hierarchical and ascriptive thinking, sexism, elitism, etc.) – envisages rather a revolutionary remake of society than a counterrevolutionary retrogression to a gone period.

> The fascist mentality is characterized by the sense of living through an imminent turning-point in contemporary history, when the dominance of the allegedly bankrupt or degenerate forces of conservatism, individualistic liberalism and materialist socialism is finally to give way to a new era in which vitalistic nationalism will triumph. (Griffin 1993, p. 44)

Thus, what fascist ideology comes down to is, according to Griffin, '[t]he vision of *the national community rising phoenix-like after a period of encroaching decadence which all but destroyed it*' (1993, p. 38, emphasis in original).

The notion of ultra-nationalism implies an ideological monism which downplays or even denies other components of human identity, and de facto views human beings not as individuals, but as cells within a national organism – however delineated. This organism does not need democracy, and is seen in a fight for survival, territory and dominance with other, similarly aggressive national organisms.

The palingenetic dimension of fascism, its totalitarian aspiration, eschatological drive, Manichean world view, sacralization of politics and theatrical ritualization of public events led some scholars to see fascism as a variety of 'political religion' (Maier 1996, Maier and Schäfer 1997, Maier 2003). The construct 'political religion' is meant to highlight the quasi-religious features of those extremist ideologies that do not constitute classic transcendental belief systems, but, in specific historical situations, may fulfil certain social and psychological functions of proper religions. Classic religions can be seen as being, because of their concern with human beings' post-mortal fate, fundamentally apolitical. 'Political religions', in contrast, promise salvation through active engagement and personal sacrifice within this world.

The definition of fascism as 'palingenetic ultra-nationalism' shall be used in the below brief content-analysis of the first edition of Russian right-wing extremist Vladimir Zhirinovskii's most important political book, *The Last Dash to the South* (Zhirinovskii 1993) as well as his articles in some of the 1992–1993 issues of the then official organ of Zhirinovskii's Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) *Liberal* (see also Umland 2008). A classification of central ideas in these publications as fascist would be possible, if (a) it can be proven that their agenda constitutes a permutation of nationalism, (b) their ethnocentrism is sufficiently extreme to be classified as integral, or ultra-nationalism, and (c) this ultra-nationalism is linked to an idea of a national new- or rebirth, or revolution – by whichever means.

Zhirinovskii's Origins

Especially in the 1990s, many accounts of the LDPR tended to portray the steep rise and continuous presence of Zhirinovskii in Russian public life as constituting a strange cultural and thus essentially non-political phenomenon, or as being merely the result of cunning 'political technology' from the Kremlin. Whatever the adequateness of such interpretations at their time, with every additional year that the LDPR is being represented with an own faction in the State Duma and that it takes part in Russia's legislative process, semi-plural-

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istic discourse as well as foreign relations, it becomes clearer that Zhirinovskii has become part and parcel of post-Soviet Russian history. The perseverance that Zhirinovskii has shown over the years can be linked to some aspects of his biography that make him appear as a more serious personality than is often acknowledged, in publicistic assessments of him. Though being born and having attended school at the periphery of the former Russian empire, the then capital of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic Almaty, Zhirinovskii managed to enter and successfully finish a study programme in Turkology at the USSR's number one college – Moscow State University. Zhirinovskii is said to speak Turkish and English well, and to know also some French and German. He later did a second advanced degree by correspondence at the same university's Law Faculty, has thus two diplomas from Russia's premier higher education institution, and can, from that point of view, be counted as one of the formally best-educated top Russian politicians today.

Zhirinovskii was an official candidate for the President of Russia as early as June 1991 (Figure 1). Having started his campaign less than 3 weeks before Russia's first presidential elections, Zhirinovskii, with more than 7% of the vote, came in third, and was the big surprise of this, perhaps, most democratic poll in Russian history (excluding the inconsequential 1917 elections for the Russian Constituent Assembly that was dissolved, by the Bolsheviks, at its first meeting in January 1918). In December 1993, the LDPR won the

Figure 1. Zhirinovskii's 1991 Russian presidential elections poster (translation: 'I will protect Russians and small people on the whole territory of Russia and the USSR'. – Candidate for the President of the RSFSR and LDP chairman Vladimir Zhirinovskii.) *Source*: URL: http://englishrussia.com/images/elections_pr/10.jpg (accessed on May 12, 2010).

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proportional part of the first post-Soviet multi-party parliamentary elections, with a large margin – 22.92% of the vote. While Zhirinovskii's performance was less impressive in the 1995, 1999, 2003 and 2007 State Duma elections, his party or electoral bloc managed each time to pass the 5% or 7% barrier, and thus has continuously had a faction in the lower house of Russia's parliament (Figure 2). By now, Zhirinovskii has been Deputy State Duma Speaker for several years, and can, in some regards, be seen as Russia's most senior post-Soviet politician (Figure 3). Founded in 1989 and officially registered in 1991, his party is older than any of the other factions currently represented in the State Duma (the Communist Party of the Russian Federation was founded and registered only in 1993). By today, it has become apparent that the Zhirinovskii phenomenon is, after all, a political one.

A Brief Sketch of Zhirinovskii's World View

The starting point of Zhirinovskii's vision of Russia's future is her location in the Northern hemisphere of Earth. Russia belongs, in Zhirinovskii's understanding, to a group of industrialized, modern and civilized nations with a European culture. As other developed Northern countries (USA, Western Europe, Japan), she faces an underdeveloped Southern landmass – Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Near East in the case of Russia, Latin America in the case of the US, Africa in the case of Western Europe, and South Eastern Asia in the case of Japan. For Russia, the way she deals with the 'South' will decide her future. Moreover, Russia's 'going down to the South' constitutes her world-historical mission in the 21st century.

Zhirinovskii views the 'Southerners' (*iuzhane*) as a distinct type of people who are inferior and dangerous in that they are unable to live in peace and rule themselves. At the same time, the 'Southerners' are cunning in trying to infiltrate and subvert Russia as well as the whole North. Turkey is the primary target of Zhirinovskii – a Turkologist by profession. Zhirinovskii thinks that pan-Turkism is going to break up Russia from within as well as attack it from outside, and that Turkish culture is, basically, worthless. The Islamic South represents a threat in general. It has, in Zhirinovskii's view, been always the source of war, nationalism, corruption and 'decay', and will continue to have destructive influence on the North, in general, and Russia, in particular, if nothing happens. The Northern civilization as a whole is threatened by the Muslim world as exemplified by the Turks' destruction of the Byzantine Empire, their occupation of Constantinople, the Armenian genocide of 1915, the rise of Islamic fundamentalism, and the current flooding of Western Europe with 'Southern' immigrants (Umland 1997).

Given these circumstances Russia has to make her 'Last Dash to the South'. That means that she has to expand her borders once more, and to 'go down to the Indian Ocean'. Afghanistan, Iran and Turkey are explicitly singled out as future parts of the Russian Empire. By implication, Pakistan would have the same fate. Russia has to go south in order to save herself, the West, and the unruly 'Southerners' from self-destruction. The central term which Zhirinovskii uses in connection with this is *uspokoenie* (soothing). Calming the people in the South will be Russia's mission in the 21st century.

The Ultra-Nationalist Dimension of Zhirinovskii's Blueprint

Zhirinovskii's nationalism has, nevertheless, been a puzzle to some scholars, like Robert Service (1998), in as far as the LDPR leader has made – resembling his utterances on other issues – contradictory statements. In the first 1993 edition of his major book *The*

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Last Dash to the South, Zhirinovskii, for instance, writes: '[A peaceful life] will become possible when Russia finds its national self-consciousness mixed up with pan-national consciousness' (Zhirinovskii 1993, p. 126). Later on Zhirinovskii occasionally also disapproved of nationalism, and claimed that he wanted to create a supra-national state. He proposed to delete the line on nationality in the Russian passport. At one point, he observed that nationalism is a 'political narcotic' (as quoted in Kulikova 1992, p. 51). At a press-conference after his electoral success in December 1993, he stated that nationalism is as bad as fascism, and proposed that, until the end of this century, 'we' should 'put an end to this terrible disease of nationalism' (as quoted in Conradi 1995, p. 212; *La Stampa*, 16 December 1993; see also Frazer and Lancelle 1994, p. 151).

In assessing such statements, several aspects of the Zhirinovskii phenomenon are pertinent. First, Zhirinovskii is himself not a 'pure' Russian, but has a partly Jewish genealogy. His biological father's name was not Vol'f Andreevich Zhirinovskii as stated in his first official biographies, but Vol'f Isaakovich Eidelshtein, as admitted in his later *curricula vitae*. Therefore, it is for Zhirinovskii problematic to propose narrowly russocentric, or biologically racist ideas (though he has, nevertheless, sometimes done so). Zhirinovskii thus tends to define the Russian nation in cultural terms: 'By Russian we mean all those who speak and think Russian' (Zhirinovskii 1993, p. 118).

Second, to promote a manifestly ethnocentric Russian nationalism would create tension within Zhirinovskii's expansionist programme. His plan is to incorporate other nationalities in an all-Russian [*Rossiiskaia*] empire which he describes as a natural union of people from Northern Eurasia down to the Indian Ocean. There is thus a conflict of interests in Zhirinovskii's urge to present his plan to the outer world as beneficial for the West and South (e.g. Umland 1994), on the one side, and to the Russians as securing their predominance on the Eurasian continent, on the other. Zhirinovskii – as all politicians – cannot help making conflicting statements. A less hesitant expression of his undoubtedly existing nationalism would make this incongruence even more obvious.

Third, Zhirinovskii's conflation of the ethno- and supranational is not new in Russian political thought. In pre-revolutionary Russia, the dynastic principle of the Tsarist Empire was often presented as having a universal and not only Russian dimension. This was meant to give non-Russians a feeling of equal consideration with ethnic Russians although, in substance, Tsarist ideology started, with the so-called Uvarov doctrine, to integrate nationalist ideas, in the first half of the 19th century, and was by the late 19th and early 20th centuries becoming openly russocentric. The messianism of the Orthodox Church too was explicitly pan-national, yet the Russian people, as the primary preservers of the 'Third Rome', played a privileged role in maintaining original Christianity. A later attempt hampered with similar contradictions was made by the so called 'Eurasianists', a group of émigré intellectuals, in the first half of the 20th century. These intellectuals justified an essentially Russian dominance over the North-Eastern Euro-Asian continent by the supposedly supra-national idea of 'Eurasianism' (Laruelle 2008; Wiederkehr 2007).

Under Stalin, Russian dominance and advancement became a priority of the supposedly inter- or even anti-national communist regime (Agursky 1987; Billington 1990; Brandenberger 2002). It continued to be a feature of post-Stalin Soviet policies (Mitrokhin 2003) as became, for instance, apparent in a number of conspicuous regularities in Soviet cadre-policy, i.e. the staffing of the posts of the Second Secretaries of the Central Committees of the Communist Parties of the Union Republics, officer positions within the KGB and Soviet Army, or offices of the Departments of the CPSU Central Committee (Bialer 1964). Stalin's and the post-Stalinist formula to conceal a Russian nationalist dominance was 'Soviet patriotism', and the role of the Russian people as an 'elder

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brother' of, or a *primus inter pares* among, the non-Russian Soviet nationalities. 'Natsionalizm' (nationalism), instead, denoted anti-imperial national movements within the Soviet bloc – whether they expressed merely anti-colonial striving for independence or explicitly ultra-nationalist ideologies of Russophobia. Zhirinovskii's crypto-nationalism employs word-games, and ideological window-dressing in ways reminiscent of Soviet newspeak. The autonomy of the non-Russian nationalities has to be preserved, he assures. Yet, Zhirinovskii's Russia would be an explicitly unitary state with a powerful president who appoints all regional leaders including local administrators. The LDP, in one of its official statements, demanded 'to put an end once and for all to nationalism', however, in the next column, encouraged Russians 'to feel themselves as masters of the whole country, the former Soviet Union and today Russia [...]' (*Liberal*, no. 8-9, 1992, p. 2). Russia, Zhirinovskii writes, would be a 'common home' (Zhirinovskii 1993, p. 77) in which many different religious groups could freely develop. Yet, 'the bells of the Orthodox Church' would be ringing at the shores of the Indian Ocean (as quoted in Koman 1996, p. 315). Notably, Zhirinovskii calls both the army and the currency of his new Russian empire '*russkie*' (ethnic Russian) and not '*rossiiskie*' (referring to the Russian state) thereby introducing a distinctly ethnic connotation to his view of these institutions (*Liberal*, no. 2[12], 1993, p. 4). TV broadcasters should not have non-Slavic faces, speak properly the Russian language, and be blond (Spier 1994). Other such examples from Zhirinovskii's writings could be listed (Frazer and Lancelle 1994).

After proclaiming himself for years an anti-nationalist 'liberal-democrat', Zhirinovskii changed publicly his line in summer 1993 when, in a major Russian newspaper, he declared:

> Internationalism – that is the common kettle, the dormitory. [...] Internationalism – that is the idea of mixture. Nationalism [in contrast] is the idea of quality. Nationalism – [this means] a separate flat – not a communal one and not a dormitory. [...] The build-up of a national state implies the build-up of a national ideology. (*Izvestiia*, 28 August 1993)

Later, such statements became more frequent.

The integral dimension of Zhirinovskii's nationalism expressed itself in two ways: in his anti-democratism, and the aggressiveness of his ethnocentrism. Endogenously, the image of a homogeneous 'we-group' – here of a national organism – is used to justify the abolition of democratic procedures, and to legitimize a hierarchical order. Exogenously, there is, in ultra-nationalism, an overdrawing, stigmatization, and externalization of 'the Other' that is used to justify absolute power for a leader who would protect and lead the nation, in its struggle with other 'we-groups', and who would not tolerate the luxury of resources-consuming public control.

Zhirinovskii has made numerous unequivocal statements in favour of dictatorship that would ensure a new national unity, and more effective domestic and foreign policy-making (Umland 1997). At other places, he, however, endorsed liberalism, democracy and political pluralism – a contradiction that resembles his inconsistent use of the term nationalism. An indicator of his political instincts is his project for a new constitution. The 1993 LDPR constitutional project resembled El'tsin's project of the same year: a strong presidential republic divided into Gouvernements, and with a two-chamber parliament. However, not only has El'tsin's Constitution adopted in December 1993 created an initially federal and formally semi-presidential regime whereas Zhirinovskii's project foresaw, from the outset, an explicitly unitary, and purely presidential system. The formal prerogatives of the executive are significantly larger, in Zhirinovskii's project, and those of the legislature to such a degree limited or elusive that there would have been few checks and

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Figure 2. Zhirinovskii during a visit to Baghdad, in the 1990s. *Source*: URL: http://www.spiritoftruth.org/images/zhirinovsky1.jpg (accessed on May 12, 2010).

balances left. For instance, the President would appoint Governors, and through them Mayors and other heads of administration. The President could be elected already in one round, i.e. with a plurality and not a majority of votes, and could be impeached only with a four-fifths-majority (and not a two-thirds-majority, as in the currently valid Constitution) in both chambers of parliament (*Proekt*… 1993). Unsurprisingly, the internal structure of the LDPR has always been distinctly undemocratic. For instance, at the 1994 LDPR congress, Zhirinovskii was elected (unanimously) party chairman for 10 years, and given the power to appoint by himself all members of central and regional governing organs without consultation of anybody.

The way Zhirinovskii treats 'Southerners' can be labelled 'civilizational racism'. He ascribes to people he subsumes under the term 'Southerners' non-human qualities arguing that the Russians would have to bear 'the White man's burden' to pacify and control these barbarians (Motyl 1994). In doing so, he does not engage in openly biological argument, but displays a ethnic differentialism also common within the Western extreme

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Figure 3. Zhirinovskii and former Russian President Vladimir Putin. *Source*: URL: http://premier.gov.ru/media/2008/8/28/9374/doc_photo.jpeg (accessed on May 12, 2010).

right. In his misnamed major newspaper of 1992–1993 *Liberal*, he announced with reference to the 'advance to the Indian Ocean':

> [O]ur model [implies] the dissolution of Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan as artificial states which have no prospects and which are essentially conquesterous [*zakhvatnicheskie*] because these are eternally nomadic tribes. [T]hat is never-ending robbery, attacks [*nabegi*], prisoners- and hostage-taking, [and] violence. (*Liberal*, no. 2 [12], 1993, p. 4)

In his shortly afterwards published book *The Last Dash*, Zhirinovskii left no doubt that what he has in mind is a full-scale war against 'the South'.

> *Let Russia successfully realize her last 'dash' to the South. I see Russian soldiers setting for this last Southern journey. I see Russian commanders in headquarters of Russian divisions and armies who draw in movement-routes for combat units and the end points of these routes. I see airplanes on air force bases in Southern regions in Russia. I see submarines surfacing on the shores of the Indian Ocean and landing-crafts approaching the shores on which already soldiers of the Russian army are marching, armoured personnel carriers and huge masses of tanks are moving.* Finally Russia is accomplishing its last military campaign [*voenny pokhod*]. (Zhirinovskii 1993, pp. 142–143; emphasis in original)

At another point, he makes clear that he would be ready to pay the price for an occupation of the South: 'Regrettably, parts of the population will perish because, in the South, there is not enough medicine and culture' (as quoted in Koman 1996, p. 319). Zhirinovskii is thus an ultra-nationalist in both, an endogenous and an exogenous sense. He uses nationalism to justify anti-democratism, and is nationalistic to the degree of an implicit propagation of genocide and a military campaign that could lead to World War III.

The Idea of the Newborn Nation in Zhirinovskii's Ideology

Zhirinovskii's ultra-nationalist plan of an advance to the Indian Ocean could appear, in the Russian context, is being essentially restorative and conservative. Territorial expansion has been a major feature in Russian history. It was, for centuries, the Russian state's mode of existence and an expression of its more generally extensive orientation in national

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development. While thus containing elements of historical continuity, the overall context of Zhirinovskii's new expansionist drive is radically different today. Not only have the international environment and socio-technological conditions since Russia's earlier expansions changed dramatically giving future imperialist adventures a novel dimension.

Zhirinovskii's justification and explanation of the blueprint, as well as his elaborations on why it is pivotal for Russia to expand, go beyond a mere return to an age-old feature, preservation of a historical pattern, or continuation of Russia's road to modernity. To be sure, there is a backward-looking aspect in fascist ideology in general, well expressed in a famous formula of the so-called 'conservative revolution', a German inter-war proto-fascist intellectual movement. The 'conservative revolutionaries' spoke of a '*Wiederanknüpfung nach vorwärts*' – 'a reconnection forwards' (Griffin 2000). This means that a 'reconnection' with the eternal values expressed in the nation's history would allow society to be regenerated and progress 'forwards'.

In this sense the 'Last Dash' too is a scheme inspired by the past. Says Zhirinovskii: 'This is not my whim. This [is] Russia's destiny. This is fate. It is Russia's heroic deed. We cannot otherwise [...] Our development demands this' (Zhirinovskii 1993, p. 104). Russia, claims the LDPR leader, fulfils a mission every 100 years. Now the time has come again for the Russians who always '[...] carried the freedom on their shoulders in whichever uniform they have been dressed – of the Tsarist army, the Soviet army, [or] the Russian army' (Zhirinovskii 1993, p. 124). Having saved the world from such villains as Napoleon and Hitler, this time Russia's task is also magnificent: 'Russia will do only what is predestined, [it will] fulfil a great historical mission – to liberate the world from wars which always start in the South' (Zhirinovskii 1993, p. 76).

Russia thus indeed turns back to its historic role as an ever-expanding state and saviour of the world. However, her rebirth in this role is shaped by novel circumstances, and her expansion has both, a new direction and a different purpose. Zhirinovskii's Russia seeks to occupy countries that never belonged to the Russian Empire, and fulfils a mission not formulated, in that way, by Russian politicians before. Zhirinovskii, moreover, makes clear that this will be the last partition of the world.

The 'South' is portrayed as a source of disease which has been and still is purposefully infecting Russia with instability and internal degradation. Zhirinovskii speaks of a 'political AIDS' and 'political Chernobyl' (Zhirinovskii 1993, p. 123), and asserts that the peril has always come

> from the side of Afghanistan which is already assaulting Tajikistan; from Teheran which makes pan-Islamic plans for annexation of huge territories; from Ankara where there have been already for long time plans for a Great Turkish State. (Zhirinovskii 1993, pp. 129–130)

These dangers make democracy and pluralism unsuitable for Russia. In an interview with for the German neo-fascist journal *Nation und Europa*, Zhirinovskii theorized:

> In a multi-ethnic state such as Russia, the parliamentary form of Government is an utopia which is, moreover, dangerous for the life of the peoples. The democratic inclination towards decline [*demokraticheskoe upadnichestvo*] opened the channel for an overstrain with aliens. The establishment of a party democracy would be the end of my homeland. Russia can be saved only with an authoritarian regime. (*Liberal*, no. 1[11], 1993, p. 8)

The 'Last Dash' is thus a sort of defensive offensive to prevent Russia's ongoing destruction or subversion by 'Southerners', and to save the world from the Islamic peril and 'World War III'. Russia has 'a global task of planetarian significance' (Zhirinovskii 1993, pp. 65–66).

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In Zhirinovskii's imagery, Russia is a Northern country caught in the Tundra. Having lost its southern parts, i.e. the Caucasus and Central Asia, it is in need for recreation space for its people – an argument paralleling somewhat the idea of the Nazis that the Germans need living space (*Lebensraum*): 'There at the shores of the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean would be holiday centres, youth camps, sanatoriums, houses for recreation for the industrial North' (Zhirinovskii 1993, p. 66).

The specific value of the warm South has not only a practical, but also a metaphysical dimension: 'The warm breath of the ocean will calm all who live in this new geopolitical space, these new frontiers of Russia' (Zhirinovskii 1993, p. 124). Zhirinovskii finds that Russia has amassed a lot of 'filth' in the 20th century. As a result of the 'Last Dash', however, the Russians 'will enter the 21st century as a different, as a clean [people]' (Zhirinovskii 1993, p. 117).

Finally, the 'Last Dash' is not only valuable in terms of its aims. Its execution as such would be beneficial. It would provide for

> the foundation for a renaissance of the Russian army. New armed forces can be reborn only as a result of a battle operation. The army cannot get stronger in registration offices and barracks. It needs an aim, a task. (Zhirinovskii 1993, p. 70)

The '[Last Dash] would be a cleansing for all of us. [...] It will be the mean for the survival of the nation as a whole [...]' (Zhirinovskii 1993, pp. 75, 70).

The Four Palingenetic Dimensions of Zhirinovskii's Ideology

Zhirinovskii's vision of a national palingenesis through a 'going down' to the Indian Ocean can be interpreted as having four interconnected dimensions. First, Russia will be reborn 'reconnecting' to her eternal mission of saving the world, and fulfilling a destiny irrevocably given to her by History. This time, she protects the 'civilized' North from the growing Islamic threat, and takes on the 'white man's burden' of governing unruly 'Southerners'. Second, the Russians have to execute the 'Last Dash' and introduce a centralized, unitary, authoritarian and, at least by implication, Russian-dominated regime from 'Kabul to Istanbul' in order to save their nation from imminent internal degradation through further penetration with aliens. They have to deal finally with the 'South' because 'all of Russia's ills are in the South' (Zhirinovskii 1993, p. 45). By way of eventually taking care of its major historic dilemma, the Russian nation will be rejuvenated through its liberation from centuries-old destructive Southern influence. Third, Russia as a Northern country will be reborn by finally getting deserved access to warm waters, and by being able to cleanse herself from the 'filth' of the past. She will become a country with a novel, forward-looking identity freed from historical complexes. Fourth, the Russian people and its army will be born anew through the armed campaign itself which will result into a 'soothing' of the whole Eurasian continent. Zhirinovskii's Russia would be a *new* country: clean, calm, of so far unknown extension. She would again be equipped with a world-historical mission as well as purified and steeled by a large military operation.

Conclusion: The Ideology of Revolutionary Imperialism

As shown, Zhirinovskii's ideology can be classified as (a) ultra-nationalist, and (b) palingenetic. Zhirinovskii's national revolution is of a peculiar kind. The LDP-leader proposes not merely an internal restructuring of Russia into a centralized unitary authoritarian

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state, and imperial expansion in order to restore the Russian Empire, or to acquire new resources, labour and markets. Such aims, by itself, could, in the Russian context, be seen as constituting merely restorative demands. Their realization would only mean a return to previous patterns. Instead, Zhirinovskii's russocentric unitarianism in domestic affairs and irredentism in foreign relations is superseded by his obsession with the idea of Russia's degradation and the necessity of the creation of a novel empire. Apart from – for much of Russian nationalism typical – anti-Westernism,[2] Zhirinovskii is especially concerned by the 'South' and the 'Southerners' and their alleged guiltiness for many, if not most of Russia's grievances and ills. Russia is, in Zhirinovskii's world view, understood as a collective national predator which needs military conquest and dominion of others as this is her way to subsist.

In pre-1945 Germany and Italy, the most important palingenetic metaphors – the Nazis' genocidal racial-eugenic cleansing, and the Fascists' creation of a *stato totalitario* – had, in the first instance, a domestic dimension. To be sure, Nazism had also a universal dimension in that, somewhat similar to Zhirinovskii's world view, it made the Nordic race its primary point of reference. Moreover, the idea of territorial expansion of Germany and Italy was salient in both of these fascist ideologies from their inception. Yet, in Italian and German fascism, the annexation of territories constituted eventually only an extrapolation of their nations' domestic reawakening, into foreign affairs. In Zhirinovskii's thought, in contrast, the primary palingenetic metaphor has had, from the outset, an international focus: rebirth itself is to be achieved through an advance to the Indian Ocean and creation of a new centralized Russian Empire from 'Kabul to Istanbul'. That means imperialism is not a secondary stage, outgrow or extension of an internal palingenesis, as was the case Nazi Germany or Fascist Italy. Russia's regeneration itself happens through her new territorial advance. The creation of a novel empire constitutes not a continuation, but already the substance of the specifically Russian national revolution. The palingenesis of Russia envisaged by Zhirinovskii is peculiar, but thorough: his ideal state would look unlike any other Russian state before. In the light of its specificity, Zhirinovskii's case can be used to introduce a new variety of palingenetic ultra-nationalism, i.e. to formulate a new sub-species of generic fascism that might be labelled 'revolutionary ethno-imperialism'.[3]

That such a distinct form of palingenetic ultra-nationalism would emerge in Russia should, in principle, not surprise. Russia is a European country, but has, obviously, a – by European standards – unusual history. Above all, it is a nation the identity of which is more deeply informed by its imperial past than the consciousness of those former empires which had their colonies oversees, often on far-away soil. A major, if not the dominant issue in Russia's national history during the last 500 years has, in contrast, been how far the Russian state should be extended, as well as which territories should be annexed in which way and for which purpose, to Muscovy's original lands. In distinction, the major issues of 19th century German and Italian history were national unification. In the 20th century, the German and Italian people were still relatively young nation-states with an insecure national identity that many nationalists felt as being in need of clearer definition and further reaffirmation. The rebirth programmes that these fascist movements proposed had thus an initially domestic dimension, and foresaw imperial expansion only in a second step. The core of the Russian 'national body' has, in contrast, by now been demographically unified and territorially stable for several centuries.

Many post-war ultra-nationalist ideologies have come to feature prominently foreign policy issues. The world has become 'smaller' since 1945 with geographical and political borders losing their significance at an ever higher rate. There is thus no wonder that the

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most important contemporary European variety of fascism has been conceptualized as Euro-fascism, in that these ultra-'nationalists' are not any longer ethnocentrists in a narrow sense, but are instead obsessed with the 'European civilization' or 'Occident', and its cultural or racial 'identity', 'authenticity', 'purity', etc. (Griffin 1993, 1995, 1998; Griffin *et al.* 2006). When proposing his programme of instigating a Russian national rebirth through the creation of a novel empire in northern Eurasia, Zhirinovskii is, in Alexander Motyl's words, thus 'a man of his times' (1994).

Short Biography

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Notes

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[1] Also, the term is used in biology where it means the repetition of phylogenetic stages of development during germ formation. In geology, 'palingenesis' denotes reshaping of rocks through their re-melting (*Kleines Fremdwörterbuch* 1974, p. 263).

[2] That Zhirinovskii sees Russia as being part of the community of Northern civilized countries, and, at the same, time has made himself a name for being rabidly anti-Western should not surprise. Contradictions such as these have been characteristic of much fascist political rhetoric in the past and present. It might suffice to mention the inconsistent racial views and policies of the Nazi leadership which adapted its approaches to, for instance, Europe's various Slavic nations according to current necessity. See Connelly 1999.

[3] It needs to be noted that 'fascism' is, of course, not the only concept with which the Zhirinovskii phenomenon can be interpreted, in an enlightening way. 'Fascism' seems to be a heuristically more useful designation for Zhirinovskii's agenda of a 'last dash to the South' than other generic concepts that can be justifiedly applied too, e.g. expansionism, racism or nationalism. Still, 'fascism' might not be the only, and, perhaps, not the most important concept with which to comprehend the political rise and endurance of Zhirinovskii. A number of other research approaches – populism, anti-politics, protest voting, etc. – may be me more appropriate to explain these phenomena than fascism.

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